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THE MAN OF SCIENCE AND THE PUBLIC¹

AN APPRECIATION OF SPENCER FULLERTON BAIRD

NEVER are the limitations of language more keenly felt than when the attempt is made to depict a human life.

If I could create, in however small degree, in the minds of those who never knew him, some understanding of the spirit of unselfish devotion to service that animated Professor Baird, of his unfailing wisdom, his clear, comprehending intellect, his evident reserve power, his kindly interest in others, his quiet eloquence in conversation, his serenity of mind and purity of heart, I should be content.

But how impossible it is to give adequate expression to a life of such fulness as that of Professor Baird's. His biographers, one after another, lament their inability to describe in commensurate terms the simple grandeur of this man, and to set forth in proper proportions his achievements. Professor Goode, in one of his memoirs, as if in despair at the feebleness of language to accomplish such a task, says:

Such a man has a thousand sides, each most familiar to a few, and perhaps entirely strange to the greater part of those who know him.

But Professor Baird was not many-sided in the sense in which that term is usually employed. No one who knew him would have thought of calling him versatile. All who have written of him unite in bearing

¹ Address delivered at the dedication of a memorial tablet to Spencer Fullerton Baird on the forty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the United States Bureau of Fisheries, Auditorium of the National Museum, February 9, 1916.